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ABSTRACT

The question of what constitutes a multicultural curriculum was addressed by examining the experiences of three Latina students, each attending a different urban high school, who were followed through freshman and sophomore years. Two questions guided the inquiry: (1) where is curriculum relevant to ethnicity? and (2) how do students evaluate and respond to ethically relevant curriculum when it is encountered. The emphasis was on students' perceptions and evaluation of three potential sources of ethnically relevant curricula--the explicit (encountered in texts and assignments) and the hidden. The hidden curriculum includes the "relational" (lessons learned about intercultural communication from relationships with peers and teachers) and the "differentiating" (lessons about finding a place in the social structure learned through observations of teacher expectations and students' educational choices). Data were gathered based on interviews; school and classroom observations; student records; students' conceptions of their ethnicity; and family and peer relationships. Findings suggest that only in environments where youth can openly display their ethnicity does curriculum foster an appreciation of diversity; only in environments where disenfranchised youth are enabled to empower themselves do youth have the opportunity to acquire the skills necessary to take effective action against oppression and inequality. (LL)

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BORDER CURRICULA AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY: IMPLICATIONS FOR MULTICULTURAL THEORISTS

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BORDER CURRICULA AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY: IMPLICATIONS FOR MULTICULTURAL THEORISTS

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April 1992

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Perhaps the greatest of all pedagogical fallacies is the notion that a person learns only the particular thing he is studying at the time.

- John Dewey

* * *

What constitutes a truly "multicultural" curriculum? Ongoing debates on the meaning of this term reveal that scholars disagree on issues of content - for example, while some argue that such a curriculum should only strive to foster an appreciation of diversity, others argue that it should help students understand social stratification. (Sleeter & Grant 1987) Yet, the recent furor over the adoption of new textbooks in California reveal that many - university scholars, policy makers and classroom teachers - agree on one matter. That is, many look hopefully to what gets put in front of students - in the form of textbooks and written assignments - as key to accomplishing their social goals. (Sleeter & Grant 1987, This World: San Francisco Examiner 10/91)

Those focussing on textbooks and other written curricula make an important point. As Eisner (1985) reminds us, the "null curriculum" - what schools do not teach - has important effects on the kinds of options youth can consider and the perspectives from which they can view a situation or problem. Yet, as many educational scholars have pointed out, the written, explicit curriculum is but one important aspect of the school discourse. (Apple 1979, Dreeben 1968, Eisner 1985) These scholars argue that a "hidden," implicit curriculum, embedded in the culture of the classroom and the school, also serves to socialize youth to particular norms and values. Therefore, with regard to the question of how schools should teach about ethnic diversity and social stratification, it makes sense to ask about more than what students should encounter in their textbooks

and classroom activities. Scholars and school professionals must also critically examine how existing, taken-for-granted classroom and school processes teach youth about the meaning of cultural and social differences. (O'Connor 1987) For example, are students being exposed to a multicultural curriculum if, in the process of studying social stratification and cultural diversity, they are subjected to an authoritarian classroom climate or told that they must not cooperate on a written take-home examination? Are students receiving a multicultural education when their school simultaneously "tracks" some students toward low-paying, low-status labor and others towards professional occupations?

In this paper I attempt to provide insight into these epistemological and practical questions by looking at the experiences of three Latina high school youth. Two questions have guided my inquiry. First, where, for these youth, is the curriculum relevant to their ethnicity? Do they speak solely of what they see in texts? Or do they describe other aspects of their school environment, eg. relationships with culturally different teachers and peers, academic tracking, as sending important messages? Second, how do these youth evaluate and respond to the ethnically-relevant curricula they encounter?

Theoretical Background

This paper deals with questions of both curricular and anthropological interest. As such, I draw on both curricular theory and contemporary anthropological notions of ethnicity, using theory developed by Michel Foucault to link these bodies of literature.

My approach to this problem is based in poststructural social theory. In The Subject and Power, Foucault (1983) argues that the selves we create are embedded in disciplinary relationships laced with power and meaning. Within institutions, systems of speech, symbols, and ways of conceptualizing the world (themselves a reflection of historical, political and economic factors) provide a cultural curriculum (or "discourse") that teaches participants the meaning of institutional categories, eg. prisoner, soldier, student. In summarizing this point, Dreyfus and Rabinow explain "Discipline 'makes' individuals...not by crushing them or lecturing them, but by "humble" procedures of training and distribution. It operates through a combination of hierarchical observation and normalizing judgement." (1983:156) Curricular theory helps alert us to some of the taken-for-granted lessons that discipline students' behaviors and conceptions during the approximately 12,000 hours they spend in school prior to graduation. For example, critical educational theorists describe a "hegemonic curriculum" that legitimates the values, perspectives, and behaviors necessary to the functioning of the American capitalist economy. This curriculum includes often taken-for-granted aspects of the school environment which signify social stratification, such as academic tracking and unbalanced staffing patterns, as well as an emphasis on competition and on working individually rather than cooperatively. Such scholars also point out that the school curriculum tends to favor those in power, as the values, beliefs, attitudes and competencies valued by schools ("cultural capital") are selectively possessed by particular groups of students due to their socialization within a particular class. (Apple 1979, Bourdieu & Passeron 1977) One could argue that the taken-for-granted, "objective"

division of students into academic tracks, especially when combined with the fact that European American and Asian American youth tend to dominate advanced courses, disciplines students' conceptions about who is and who is not capable of high academic achievement. Other educational scholars have pointed out the important messages that variable teacher expectations (Baron, Tom & Cooper 1985, Cooper & Tom 1984, Spindler & Spindler 1982) and school mission (Lightfoot 1983, Metz 1986) can send to students. Teacher-student relationships communicate messages about whether youth are seen as objects to be managed and molded or subjects whose voices count and should be heard.

According to Foucault, participants in relationships respond and react to these meanings as they strive to interpret and make sense of each other over time. As such, power is embodied in personal relationships, for individuals, in the process of trying to make sense of each other, make active efforts to force others into comprehensible categories by offering love and affection to those who behave as desired and punishment to those who do not. As Foucault explains, "The exercise of power is not simply a relationship between partners, individual or collective; it is a way in which certain actions modify others." (1983: 219) At the same time, individuals are not inert objects available either for the free play of historical and political forces or one another's whims. Rather, individuals can and do resist the meanings they encounter even as others seek to push them towards comprehensible categories. As such, social categories are constantly negotiated and renegotiated. Foley (1991), for example, points out that historically, various ethnic and racial groups have struggled - sometimes successfully - against class,

race and gender exploitation. As such, "a capitalist racial order must be studied as a dialectical historical process..." (p. 78) While in certain school settings some youth of color may reject school success as "acting white" (cf. Fordham & Ogbu 1986), in others groups of high-achieving youth of color may band together to resist constraining societal definitions, achieving academically while at the same time working to assert and display aspects of their ethnic identity. (Foley 1991, Hoffman 1988) Anthropological scholars writing in Foucault's vein argue that the selves we present can vary across specific contexts, such as work and family settings. (cf. Kondo 1990) Moreover, ethnic identity, which refers to the presentation of one's ethnicity in a social matrix in a way that significant others accept and recognize, is constantly recreated, coming forward or retreating to the background in response to the politics and relations which characterize changing social situations. (Clifford 1988, Okamura 1981, Roosens 1989) Ethnically-relevant meanings in multi-ethnic societies are potentially dynamic and often conflictual. (Clifford 1988, Rosaldo 1989, Spindler & Spindler 1990) Clifford criticizes the either assimilation or resistance emphasis in the anthropological and sociological literature (eg. Giroux 1983, Willis 1977, Ogbu 1987), arguing instead that "stories of interaction must...be more complex, less linear and teleological." (p. 344) For example, individuals moving through multicultural environments may create multiplex personal identities, showing a "gift for improvisation and recombination within an array of disparate cultural elements..." (Rosaldo 1989: 215) Or, as Anzalua describes, individuals may cope "by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity." (1987:79) Indeed, contemporary educational ethnographers have pointed out that assimilation/school

success or resistance/school failure are not the only patterns of identity youth adopt. For example, youth may express an oppositional culture while at the same time add cultural capital to their communicative competencies, thereby achieving academically. (cf. Foley 1991, Hoffman 1988, Shamai 1987)

In this paper, I explore how both explicit and implicit curricula create meanings about social categories which students take account of as they negotiate their ethnic identity within school settings. My emphasis is on students' perceptions and evaluation of three potential sources of ethnically-relevant curricula. The first is the "explicit curriculum" (Eisner 1985) students encounter in texts and assignments. The second and third stem out of the implicit, "hidden" curriculum. For the sake of clarity, I differentiate between what I call "relational" and "differentiating" curricula. The first refers to the lessons available to youth from schools and classrooms about the means and possibilities of communicating and working with others socially different from themselves. Such lessons are learned as youth experience the relations between different ethnic groups and as youth develop relationships with teachers and administrators. The second refers to aspects of schools and classrooms which teach youth about their place in the structure of society. Such lessons can be found in the expectations teachers convey to their students, as well as in students' observations of which students tend to attend what academic track and which groups of youth have access to sources of cultural capital, in the form of information about colleges and careers.

The Study: Design and Methods

This study grew out of a larger project being carried out at the Center for Research on the Context of Secondary School Teaching (CRC) at Stanford University. The "Students' Multiple Worlds" study[1] focuses on identifying, from the student's perspective, factors which impact students' academic and social engagement with the school community. (Phelan, Davidson & Cao 1991, Phelan, Cao & Davidson 1992) Our initial interviews with students about classrooms and schools indicated first, that students receive clear messages about social diversity from various aspects of their school environments, and second, that the meaning students attribute to their ethnicity can play an important role in their educational engagement.

Student descriptions inspired an embedded study which focussed first, on understanding how students experience their ethnic identity, and second, on exploring potential connections between this experience and the ethnically-relevant curricula youth encounter. This paper focusses on the experiences of three of the ten youth included in this embedded study. The three are academically high-achieving female Latina students from poor or working class backgrounds. All were freshmen when the study began, and were followed to the end of their sophomore year. Each attended a different urban high school.

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[1] The Students' Multiple Worlds study includes 54 students from four diverse high school settings in two California school districts. Students vary on a number of dimensions, including gender, ethnicity, achievement level, immigrant history and transportation status. An equal number of high and low-achieving students were selected from each school and both European American students and students of color are included in the two achievement categories.

The three high schools these students attend are similar first, in terms of their location in middle-class residential neighborhoods and second, in terms of striking demographic shifts within the last decade due to desegregation plans. Maple High School and Explorer High School both opened three decades ago as comprehensive high schools serving upper-middle-class communities. Between 1985 and 1991, the enrollment of students of color increased from 18.2 to 58 percent at Explorer, with 36 percent of students eligible for the district transportation plan. Forty percent of Explorer's student body is Latino and 31 percent need language assistance. Demographic shifts at Maple are similar; the enrollment of students of color shot from 29.2 percent in 1980 to 60.6 percent in 1991, with 38 percent of these youth transported to school. Maple's student body is 45.7 percent Latino and 23 percent need language assistance. Finally, like Explorer and Maple High Schools, Huntington High School's minority population has increased substantially (from 21.9 percent in 1985 to 50 percent in 1991, with 19 percent of these students eligible for the district transportation program), but the shift includes students of Asian descent, many of them Vietnamese immigrants in need of language assistance. Twenty one percent of Huntington's student body is Latino, 23 percent is of Asian descent, and 15 percent need language assistance.

The findings reported here are based on six semi-structured interviews with each student, school and classroom observations, and analyses of student record data. Students' conceptions of their ethnicity, family and peer relationships, school and classrooms, and access to informational/structural resources were major foci of the interviews. Classroom observations supplement students' comments about teacher

behaviors and provide insights into how students present their ethnic identity outside of interview situations. I attended classes, went to lunch, and spent time with students and their friends during passing periods and after school hours.

Marbella Sanchez: On Dehumanization and Marginalization

Marbella Sanchez, a Mexican immigrant sophomore at Explorer High School, crossed the U.S.-Mexican border in the summer of 1989 to join her mother, who had come to the U.S. to look for more lucrative employment. The transition was radical. Marbella left behind not only a familiar language and culture, but the rural lifestyle she'd grown accustomed to in a small agricultural town (600 people) along the Pacific Coast.

Despite these substantial dislocations, Marbella adapted quickly to the new academic demands of her environment. During her first three semesters at Explorer High School, she earned all As and Bs, for one 3.67 and two 3.5 GPAs. Further, her English skills improved markedly. Teachers, such as her ESL social studies teacher who speaks below, describe her eagerness to learn and her friendly, almost radiant persona:

> Goodness just comes out of her. And she would be like, she would be an excellent teacher. She would be an excellent teacher for children. She would be someone who could take children, and take those children, and teach those children songs. And love. And life. (ES044ST1:143-159)[2]

[2] Here and elsewhere, quotations are identified by file code. These interviews are part of a public-use file which will be made available to interested researchers at the end of the CRC grant period.

Marbella's love of learning and cooperative nature show in her readiness to assist her fellow immigrants with academic work. During the three days I observed her classrooms, Marbella assisted her peers 11 times: explaining concepts, clarifying assignments, etc.

While Marbella has adapted to Explorer High School, the transition has not been easy. Marbella told us that she learned more than English and algebra during her first two years of high school, as she quickly came to understand that "the Mexican heritage doesn't have much value here in the United States." (ES50STEN:708-710) This understanding has grown partly out of the explicit curriculum she has encountered in her high school classes:[3]

> It's not spoken about very well - the Mexican heritage - here in the United States. It's not spoken about very well because the majority of the teachers don't really know about it....Mr. Vargas (ESL social studies teacher) is the only one that talks about the Mexican heritage or that has us look up things in libraries, about Mexican culture and other things. He asked us to discover how Mexico really was. (ES50STEN: 699-703, 775-787)

Yet, the lessons Marbella has learned about her heritage grow out of more than the projects and readings she has encountered in her classes. Explorer's relational and differentiating curricula have also been sources of meaning.

Explorer's Relational Curriculum

In almost all high schools students segregate themselves, at least to some extent, by ethnicity and social class. However, there can be a great degree of difference in the ways in which students experience the lines between ethnic groups. (cf. Peshkin 1991,

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[3] Marbella attended two years English as a Second Language classes (reading and English), two years of vocational classes (clothing, computer literacy and foods), two years of P.E., two years of math (introduction to algebra and algebra 1-2), one year of social studies and one year of physical science during her first two years of high school.

Phelan, Davidson & Cao 1992) In some schools, lines between ethnic groups may be relatively permeable boundaries and students move among groups with relative ease. In others, students describe the lines between ethnic groups as impenetrable social borders.

Of the 18 students interviewed at Explorer High School as part of the Students' Multiple Worlds Study, 17 described little mixing between ethnic groups, nine described personally experiencing physical or verbal assaults from culturally different peers and an additional five mentioned witnessing such assaults against members of their ethnic groups. Marbella has clearly picked up on this aspect of Explorer's ethnically relevant curriculum: "...the groups don't mix. (THE GROUPS DON'T MIX?) No, because they try to humiliate us...to many of us, including me, they call us things." (ES50STA:407-414) Marbella describes three specific instances in which either European American (twice) or Mexican American (once) peers degraded her Mexican immigrant background. Out of these and other negative encounters, Marbella has come to believe that her American-born peers view Mexican immigrant youth as inferior: "They think that they are better than us. They think that because we are in their country, we are underneath them. That makes us afraid to talk to them in English because we think they will laugh at us...."(ES50STD: 939-971)

Marbella also discerns ethnically-relevant lessons in the ways in which some adults at Explorer handle authority vis-a-vis their Mexican immigrant students. Her most discomforting experiences occur in classrooms where she perceives teachers as not making an effort to understand and work with their Mexican immigrant students. These

confrontations send particularly powerful messages when a teacher appears to single out and exert power over non-fluent English speakers:

> ....I don't like that class [P.E.] because the teacher is very racist. We have Hispanics, or actually Mexicans [immigrants], and there are some Americans there. Sometimes he chides us a lot and he doesn't say anything to them. Like sometimes we have to wear a blue and white shirt. If you wear a sweater, you have to wear the sweater underneath and the shirt on top.
>
> ...I have a friend named Bernardino. He was wearing his white shirt underneath a black sweater. And there were two Americans who were also dressed like that. Then the teacher said a lot of things to the Mexican, Bernardino. And he made him take it off and put it on top of the sweater. And he didn't say anything to the two Americans....He told him that he was going to throw him out of that class, because he didn't like stupid people who don't follow the rules in his class....
>
> [Bernardino asked] why he didn't say anything to the rest of the students. Was it because they are Americans? And he [the teacher] told him 'That has nothing to do with it. Here it has nothing to do with [who's] Mexican or American. Here, it has to do with how we come dressed. You are nobody to tell me anything. I am the teacher and you are the student.' (ES50STC:406-448)

Explorer's teacher-centered discipline policy strengthens Marbella's feeling that adults at Explorer are more interested in managing than understanding their Mexican students. The discipline principal describes himself as a "traditionalist," by which he means that he is likely to support a teacher before a student and does not believe in giving second chances. Faced with a gang-related conflict between Latino youth early in his tenure, the principal instituted a 'colors' policy, compiled a list of those he considered "key players," and eventually succeeded in removing many of these Latino students from the campus. Marbella believes that her peers are often the first to be singled out as this principal works to manage the social order. Moreover, from Marbella's perspective, this

principal's emphasis on managing rather than understanding and negotiating conflicts between student groups creates an environment which fosters anger and rebellion. In comparing him to the school disciplinarian during her freshman year, Marbella commented "he was nicer to us Mexicans. He understood us. I think most of the Mexicans now purposely don't behave because they don't like Mr. Joyce." (ES50STD:786-789)

Explorer's Differentiating Curriculum

A school's differentiating curriculum teaches students lessons about the structure of society as they experience institutional differentiation (eg. tracking policies or staffing), discern teachers' expectations for various groups of students, and observe who has access to the information that enables intelligent decisions about college application and careers. In Explorer's English as a Second Language (ESL) track, students have little opportunity for contact with American-born peers. Of the eight classes Marbella took during her sophomore year, six were composed almost entirely[4] of Latino immigrant youth. This includes Marbella's P.E. class - a course in which Explorer's youth are ostensibly integrated. At times Marbella has had to fight against further marginalization: "She [vice-principal of guidance] wanted to leave me in basic math, but I talked a lot with her until she let me go to pre-algebra. The only thing you do in basic math is what little kids do..." (ES50STD:458-465) In contrast, Explorer's honors classes are dominated by European American and Asian American students. In Marbella's sophomore class,

[4] Esperanza has a small number of Vietnamese immigrant students who attend classes with their Latino counterparts. Marbella had Vietnamese immigrant classmates in her ESL (2), algebra (1), physical science (3) and computer literacy (1) courses.

for example, three out of the 60 students in accelerated English are Latino.[5] Policies both amplify and attach status to this differentiation, as high-achieving Spanish-speaking students such as Marbella do not qualify for the school honor society because they can not take the advanced classes that qualify them for admission. Marbella is well aware of these status issues: "Later we will be in the medium classes, but since we don't speak English, we are in the lowest classes." (ES50STA:149-152)

Marbella's written response to an eliciting protocol (I wish my teachers would...) indicates that her interactions with adults in Explorer's environment have further exaggerated these lessons. She writes:

> I think my teachers should learn another method of teaching, because the one they use is not very effective. I also would like them to realize we are intelligent, that we can do things, would like them not to discriminate against us, to treat us like civilized persons, not like some sort of objects. (ES50STC: written protocol)

Marbella observes this orientation towards Mexican immigrants primarily in the expectations her teachers convey:

> ...Some think that because you are Mexican, you can't do anything. Or that because you are Mexican you can't succeed in this country....they don't give you something that - something difficult that you really can do. They make it very easy for you, and they make it a little bit more difficult for the Americans. Because they think, I don't know, that you can't do it, that you are, that you are not intelligent or maybe, I don't know. (ES50STEN: 1043-1047, 1057-1065)

For Marbella, such expectations are important because they convey respect or condescension for her and her fellow immigrant peers:

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[5] In 1990-91, fluent English-speaking ('FEP') Latinos made up 21 percent of Explorer's population, and comprised 7.6 percent of the accelerated English track. FEP Asian Americans made up 11 percent of Explorer's school population, and 16.8 percent of the accelerated track. European Americans, who made up 60.8 percent of Explorer's FEP population, comprised 69.3 percent of the accelerated track.

> Now we have not advanced in the book. We haven't done very much, the teacher uses up all the time explaining and we don't do anything. Sometimes he spends one whole week in one page. We don't feel comfortable because he treats us like if we were kindergarten kids. We feel bad, the teacher feels that we don't understand even the simpler concepts. I don't like the [algebra] teacher treating us like little kids. We understand, the problem is that he is not consistent in his explanations. (ES50STD:831-850)

Marbella's academic placement and interactions with teachers contributes to her understanding of her status within her school.

The emphasis Marbella places on the differentiating curriculum can also be seen as she praises her freshman social studies teacher, who encourages immigrant students to challenge their marginalized positions. In particular, this teacher gave Marbella access to information that offers guidance on how she can challenge her marginalized position. For example, he organized informational trips to local universities, urged his students to avoid classes like clothing and foods because electives such as computers better their chances of college acceptance, described and explained the requirements for different careers in America and organized a ballet folklorico club that eventually became part of the school's curriculum.

* * *

Marbella has told us that the hidden curriculum she encounters at Explorer has taught her that many Americans have little respect for either her heritage or for her and her immigrant peers. Marbella feels marginalized and dehumanized in her school environment. But how does she evaluate and respond to this curriculum?

On the one hand, Marbella resists Explorer's curriculum as she defines and practices her ethnic identity in opposition to negative messages:

> ....well, a Mexican is someone who knows how to depend on himself. And he has to have a different character from other people. (HOW IS THAT?) Well, it's a - it's a strong character. It doesn't let itself get vanquished very easily. For example, if he says 'I am going to be a doctor' and another person, or other people say to him 'No, don't do that because it's a very long path, very complicated' or something, well, he mustn't let himself be discouraged by what they say. If he wants to study that, he has to do that. And not [give up] because other people told him 'No, don't do that.' (ES50STEN: 654-672)

Because of the negative messages she perceives in her environment, academic success is a political issue for Marbella. She gambles on hard work as much to make a positive statement about Mexican culture as to advance her self-interests:

> It's like a bet to be here. It's like a bet that we ought to win because we need to demonstrate to other people that we indeed can make it. That it's not because we are Hispanic we can't make it. At times they [Americans] are treating you badly, right? Then you say to yourself 'I am going to demonstrate to those [people] that I indeed can be something, and that I have the capability to be something. It's not because I'm Hispanic that I can't make it.' At these times, they give you desire to study more and become someone more quickly, so as to demonstrate to all the world that it is not because you are Mexican you are going to stop below. (ES50STEN: 441-463)

Marbella seeks out friends with similar values to form a collective front in this effort. Like her, Marbella's peers are oriented towards "becoming someone" and behaving in a manner that dignifies their culture: "My friends, they think that a Mexican is someone who goes forward, someone who becomes someone, who has a career and who can triumph in a country that is not his own." (ES50STEN: 578-589)

On the other hand, as Marbella has realized her marginalized position as a Mexican immigrant in an American high school, Marbella has developed a cautious, separatist self that is equally connected to her sense of ethnicity. This self - which emerges during moments of threatening social interaction with American peers - shrinks from asserting

its rights and from conflict that might bring Marbella into contact with adults in her environment:

> I have a P.E. class, and there are some Americans with me, and so, it was my turn, it was my turn to play basketball. Then - well because in Mexico they give us basketball classes so I know a lot and I always beat them - they got mad and tried to hit me. And I didn't let them, so they got angrier, and later they stopped me, and one of them hit me. I avoid fighting in the school, because I know I am the Mexican, and in a fight between a Mexican girl and a white girl, the Mexican cannot win. And so, I paid no attention to them....My classmates asked me, 'Why are you afraid of them?'....'Why bother? [I said]. It is not worth the trouble.'(ES50STA: 434-449)

This self could have substantial implications for Marbella in terms of her gaining the cultural, linguistic and political skills necessary to assert her rights in her new environment. For example, Marbella's oral English skills lag behind her comprehension, partly because she hesitates to practice English, fearful of the punishing reaction she may receive:

> I want to talk to her [my teacher] in English, but there is always a "gringo" named John there, and he is very mean....That's why I don't speak English with Mrs. Bryant anymore. Since she understands Spanish I talk to her in Spanish. (ES50STD: 991-1006)

While Marbella resists the meanings she derives from Explorer's relational and differentiating curricula, her words and actions are also shaped by feelings of powerlessness and her awareness of discrimination. Her observations of who holds the power in Explorer's environment and how they use this power create a force which limits and constrains her in her efforts to challenge social borders.

Carla Chavez: On Isolation and the Need for Caution

Carla Chavez, a Mexican/Cuban American sophomore at Huntington High School, moves between two sociocultural worlds. At home and during her free time at school, Carla spends time with her family and Mexican-descent peers, many who have dropped out of high school. During school, Carla moves into high track classes dominated by European and Asian American students. Carla's teachers note her strong drive to succeed and the careful, cautious manner in which she approaches academic tasks:

> She is a very controlled girl....Not in an obnoxious way. But she has mapped out her life and she knows what she has to do and she has decided, at least in English, I don't know about her other classes, but she is going to be a good student. She does all of her work, very carefully. (RA003ST1: p. 1)

While Carla has in-class friends, she does not spend time with them outside the classroom. Carla's ability to make these behavioral shifts has helped her succeed in highly competitive academic environments while maintaining her neighborhood friendships. Carla earned a 4.0 GPA as a freshman and a 3.5 GPA as a sophomore with a challenging academic course load, including accelerated English, accelerated world history, chemistry and geometry.[6]

One significant lesson Carla has learned during her years in school is that "most people think that Latins aren't - you know, that they can't do nothing, that they're just going to become like in the lower class." (RA28STEN:130-134) The explicit curriculum Carla encounters may contribute to this understanding. During her first two years of

[6] During her first two years of high school, Ivonne attended two years of advanced English, two years of advanced world history, two years of science (biology and chemistry), two years of math (algebra and geometry), two years of Spanish and two years of P.E.

high school, for example, Carla says that none of her advanced courses expanded her knowledge of her heritage and culture or pointed out the accomplishments of people of color:

> I WANT TO KNOW, IN TERM OF YOUR TEACHERS AND THE SCHOOL HERE, HOW YOUR HERITAGE IS TALKED ABOUT, IF AT ALL.
>
> I don't think it's talked about. I mean all my classes, there are no Mexicans in my classes, they're in other classes. You know, cause I'm like in honors classes, and like in chemistry, most of them are Asians.
>
> WHAT ABOUT LIKE IN WORLD HISTORY? DOES YOUR TEACHER EVER TALK ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MEXICO AND THE U.S.? OR ABOUT IMMIGRATION? OR ABOUT ANYTHING THAT MIGHT BE RELATED TO YOUR PAST HISTORY?
>
> No....like China's, and Britain's and all that. Except when they're (teachers) doing the expansion of Spain. And they (Spaniards) settled in Florida? (UM-HMM) And then ahm, Mexico. (RA28STEN: 765-789)

Even in Carla's Spanish class, the primary emphasis is on grammar and vocabulary acquisition.

Huntington's Relational and Differentiating Curricula

As at Explorer High School, students at Huntington tend to spend their free time with students from similar ethnic backgrounds. Here, however, the similarities end. Of the eight European American, Latino and African American students interviewed at Huntington, all described the lines between ethnic groups as relatively permeable social boundaries. None of these students mentioned feeling afraid of other groups or described experiences with physical or verbal conflict. Like her peers, Carla sees little evidence of tension between students who are transported from downtown and students who live in the upper-middle-class neighborhood surrounding Huntington:

DOES IT SEEM LIKE THERE'S A LOT OF TENSION BETWEEN CERTAIN GROUPS HERE AT THIS SCHOOL?

Tension? No, I don't think so.

OKAY. THIS IS THE CLASSIC ONE THAT OFTEN CAUSES TENSION...STUDENTS BEING BUSSED HERE AND THE STUDENTS WHO LIVE IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD. ANY OF THAT?

I don't think so. Not that I know...I don't see why there'd be tension between them. (RA28STD:1182-1195)

This is not to say that Huntington's ethnic boundaries are completely permeable. While students do chat easily in the classroom and greet one another at lunchtime, some students do describe a subtle feeling of racism in the air. However, what is important here is that Carla finds a curriculum which tells her that cross-cultural interaction is both possible and normal. As such, when she is seen walking and talking with European and Asian American classmates, her Latino peers do not immediately categorize her as having "sold out." Likewise, when she leaves her European and Asian American peers at lunch, she is not questioned about why she hangs around with Latina friends.

Given the lessons Carla learns from her school's differentiating curriculum, it is probably important that she does not have to cope with negative attention other students. Carla is one of a handful of Latina students enrolled in Huntington's advanced track.[7] Moreover, during her sophomore year she was the only transported Latina in her advanced classrooms. From Carla's perspective, those around her - the home friends, her classroom friends and her teachers - take for granted the fact that Huntington's

[7] In 1990-91, Latinos made up 19.3 percent of Huntington's fluent English-speaking (FEP) population, and comprised 10.6 percent of the accelerated English track. Asian Americans made up 15.8 percent of Huntington's FEP population, and 34.3 percent of the accelerated English track. European Americans, who made up 58.2 percent of Huntington's FEP population, comprised 53.2 percent of the accelerated English track.

advanced classes are dominated by European and Asian American students; most seem to expect Latino students to get bad grades: "You know, they expect that like most Mexicans get Fs. So they, you know, they're surprised [that I do well], because Mexicans don't do good. Most of them are dropouts." (RA28STEN:749-754) This general acceptance of the status quo makes Carla's movement across the border which separates Huntington's general and advanced tracks psychologically discomforting, as Carla is left with the uncomfortable feeling that she must prove that she belongs:

> I kind of feel uncomfortable. Not many Mexicans and Hispanics are in those classes. And so it kind of makes me feel uncomfortable. (WHAT ABOUT THAT MAKES YOU FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE?) Because...they probably think of me as weird, because they think Hispanics, probably they have this view that most Hispanics are dumb or something. Have that opinion, you know, get bad grades. So, I don't know why I feel uncomfortable, I just...means you're not really with any other...many people...probably by the end of the year they might realize that I belong. (RA28STD:540-570)

Carla fears making mistakes because her peers may attribute their source to her ethnic background: "If I raise my hand and say the wrong thing, I feel dumb. (BECAUSE YOU'RE LATINO?) Yeah." (RA28STD:592-595)

The fact that the information Carla receives from adults in her environment about colleges and careers is both scanty and confusing only adds to her feelings of isolation. Her participation in advanced classes makes her well aware that "cultural capital" is important. Daily, she hears her classroom peers discuss the importance of maintaining high grades in advanced classes. Frequently, she is reminded of the reputation of various universities and of the importance of SAT and other achievement tests. However, Huntington High School does not have academic or personal counseling, and Carla has

found no adult in her school environment with whom she can discuss her goals and ask questions. Students are assigned to "Assist" teachers, who ideally function as advisors as they meet with a set group of students on a regular basis through their four years of high school. However, at the end of her sophomore year Carla's Assist teacher still barely knew her:

> I [had] already made my schedule. He just looked at my stuff, 'Oh, accelerated!' They were surprised, I guess. (REALLY?) Yeah, I guess, I guess he didn't know I was in accelerated classes.
>
> YOU MEAN YOU'VE HAD THIS PERSON ALL YEAR FOR ASSIST AND HE DIDN'T KNOW?!
>
> Yeah, and last year also. And he didn't know I was accelerated. (YOU'RE KIDDING!) Yeah, he looked on my list and my mom was supposed to come for a meeting, and she wasn't able to. And he saw the list that I had and he saw accelerated and he goes 'Oh that's good.' And that was that. (RA28STD:834-851)

Because neither of her parents attended college, Carla has little direct access to knowledge about the social system. To cope with her lack of information, she must turn to her European and Asian American peers with questions about college requirements and the time, location and meaning of various achievement tests. Carla finds her friends' knowledge of the system rather amazing:

> Ann, my gosh, she knows all those things about tests and all that....She's a good source of information. Like, they know all these things about college, what tests you're supposed to take and I'm all 'How'd you find that out?' (RA28STD:1009-1021)

While one could argue that this situation might help foster Carla's friendships with culturally and ethnically different peers, it does have significant drawbacks. Most importantly, this situation places Carla in a dependent position. She learns that it is

important to keep on her European and Asian American peers' good sides if she is to gain access to information which helps her understand the system.

* * *

For Carla, lessons relevant to her ethnic identity are generated largely out of her school's differentiating curriculum. She is well aware that few Mexican peers join her in her advanced classes and that many around her believe that Mexican students lack the intellectual ability to succeed in school. Moreover, while she fights to challenge this stereotype she has little access to information that enable her efforts to do so. But how does Carla evaluate and respond to these lessons?

On the one hand, like Marbella, Carla resists the negative messages she encounters, for she conceives of her ethnicity primarily in terms which are oppositional to others' low expectations. When asked how she feels about her heritage, she replies:

> Well, I'm proud of it. I feel that, you know, that Latins aren't stupid. I'd like to be one of them that could achieve something. Cause most people think that Latins aren't - you know, that they can't do nothing, that they're just going to become like in the lower class. And, I think that that's not true. I think that everybody's the same. You can do anything you want to. (RA28STEN:125-136)

Like Marbella, achieving academically is a strategy Carla uses to resist the negative messages she receives from those around her. Achor and Morales (1990) have identified a similar pattern among Chicanas holding doctoral degrees, where "negative messages casting doubts on the abilities of persons of their ethnicity and gender to succeed served not as an impeder, but as an impetus to prove the messages wrong." (p. 280-1)

However, unlike Marbella, Carla does not equate aspects of her Latina heritage with her academic success, nor does she reveal her ethnic self in the classroom. While Carla

believes that "you can work among white people without being white," (RA28STEN:809-815) she leaves her ethnic self outside the classroom door, conforming to European American middle class norms of classroom interaction and behavior. In Carla's case these include speaking mainstream English, working individually, and divorcing her personal experience from her interactions with classroom friends:

> You don't really share your personal life with them, cause you really aren't, you know, the culture isn't quite [the same]. We don't talk about that. We just talk about school or school things. We just talk about school. (RA28STD:1253-1259)

Carla's conversations with her class friends center on school: how to get on a teacher's good side, what needs to be done to prepare for the SAT, how to best complete a homework assignment, and teacher personalities. Non-academic conversations with these friends are light and non-personal: "I had toast and orange juice for breakfast." "Your hair looks good like that Carla."

Outside the classroom door, while with her friends from her community, Carla releases the hold on her ethnicity, pushing her blended ethnic identity to the fore. She uses barrio English - inserting "Mexican words, if Spanish goes real well" (RA28STEN: 572-574) into English phrases: "Que quieres comer?" "I ain't eatin'. Why you eatin' yogurt? It's sick!!" Her classroom persona disappears as the conversation moves to talk of friends, boyfriends and family: "I don't talk to them about school and all that. I talk to them more about my personal life and how I feel. It's different." (RA28STD:1267-1270) Despite the fact that several of her closest friends have left high school and some of them have children of their own, Carla finds that their interests and values set her at ease in a way that those of her friends from class do not: "I feel more comfortable with

them. That I don't feel with my friends from class....We listen to the same music, you know, we talk about the same things, like on a similar subject kind of. But with my classroom friends, they like different things, they're into probably different music, they have like a different life than I do." (RA28STC:858-860, 877-889)

While Carla discounts many of the messages she receives about her background, she is also well aware of the power of insitutional sorting forces and of her lack of information relative to her classroom friends. Good relations and acceptance by these peers are important if she hopes to achieve her goals. Practically and sensibly cautious, Carla does not risk these friendships by revealing too much.

Patricia Schmidt: On Social Categorization and Empowerment

Every weekday morning, Patricia Schmidt - daughter of a Mexican immigrant mother and a working-class European American father - is one of over 300 students who rides a bus 45 minutes from a primarily Latino poor and working-class neighborhood to Maple High School, located in a primarily European American, middle-class attendance zone. At home, Patricia speaks both Spanish and English and spends the majority of her time with her Mexican immigrant boyfriend. At school, Patricia maintained a 3.83 overall grade point average ('GPA') during her sophomore year, with a challenging academic course load, including advanced English and geometry.[8] But Patricia stands out for more than her high achievement. Maple's adults, such as her advanced English teacher

[8] During her first two years of high school, Patricia attended two years of advanced English, two years of Spanish, two years of P.E., two years of math (algebra and geometry), one year of advanced world history, and one year of computer programming. Additionally, Patricia attended two years of Personal Effort for Progress (PEP), an academic enrichment program designed primarily for low-income youth of color.

teacher who speaks below, note her independent thinking as well: "I had a student teacher the first semester, so I could sit back and observe. And within two days, I could tell Patricia was a top student. She'll kind of sit back and watch and then just....(BAM!?) Yeah!"

Like Marbella and Carla, Patricia has had little opportunity to explore the Mexican aspects of her heritage in her classes. Only one - second-year Spanish - stands out as offering this opportunity. For Patricia this class was positive because it enabled her to acquire cultural capital that will carry weight across the Mexican border. While Patricia is nearly fluent in Spanish, she is learning to read and write in her second language. Spanish has also helped Patricia broaden her understanding of Central and South American geographies and cultures. Patricia valued and enjoyed these curricular opportunities. Spanish was her favorite of six classes during her sophomore year.

Maple's Relational Curriculum

For Patricia, Maple's relational curriculum has generated two sets of ethnically-relevant meanings. On the one hand, a few of Patricia's teachers demonstrate their ability to cross social borders and communicate and work positively with others different than themselves. For example, Patricia's Spanish teacher is a Latino male who not only teaches at Maple High School and works in the bilingual department of the district office, but also teaches English to adults in Patricia's Northside community. Her Personal Effort for Progress (PEP) teacher, a European American male, has spent all of

his professional life working with youth of color - first in an all-black school district and later as director of Maple's PEP program.[9]

On the other hand, Patricia's interactions with some of her peers teach her that, in striving to achieve academically, she violates the social rules of her environment. While verbal and physical conflict was not a concern for nine of the ten youth interviewed at Maple as part of the Students' Multiple Worlds study, seven of the ten youth interviewed described borders between Maple's Northside and local youth - borders that prevent or impede social interaction. Northside youth who cross this division to work alongside local youth in advanced classes describe having to cope with negative stereotypes from local peers and criticism from their Northside friends as well. Patricia comments:

> Well, the only problem I can see in the advanced classes is that there's a majority of...I don't know if I should use that word.... (WHITE KIDS?) White kids. And sometimes we have - like first semester we used to have class discussions with our student teacher. We used to have class discussions. And they used to like sort of put, you know, the other races down. And it used to, you know, sometimes I wanted to blow my top....like they had this one theory. Oh! One time we had a class discussion, it was about Lord of the Flies. But, 'Well what if the schools was like Lord of the Flies? No adults around, no nothing. Who do you think would take over the school?' And they go 'The gangs. They would be out there terrorizing' and all this....I guess I believe that, you know, the kids up here [in Maple] have a stereotype of the kids that like get bussed in. You know, they're from Northside, they're gangs, they're violence. You know, they always do this. I don't really like it but I guess you can't really change someone's thoughts unless they want to change their thoughts and stuff. (VA17STD:1118-1151, 1715-1724)

[9] The PEP program was started by a Maple teacher in 1980 and has proven highly successful: over 90 percent of the students who have enrolled in PEP have graduated and gone on to college. As of the 1990-91 school year, 98 students, 88 of them youth of color, were enrolled in the program at Maple High School.

I WANTED TO KNOW IF YOU EVER GOT A HARD TIME FOR BEING A WOMAN WHO IS SO SUCCESSFUL. FROM ANY OF YOUR FRIENDS [FROM NORTHSIDE].

> Ohhhh. A hard time? I heard, let's see, I guess they were playing around, but in a way, it was like, it's like ironic I guess you would say. Because they used to tell me 'Oh, look at Miss Executive, getting all these high grades.' But, you know, they were actually trying [to say], you know, Miss Smarty Pants....I guess people - this is what I noticed yesterday. People don't really expect me to be smart....And, I guess when they find out, it's like all of a sudden, they start calling me 'schoolgirl.' And then they forget about it, and then when report [card] time comes again, schoolgirl comes back. So, it doesn't bother me. (VA17STEN:977-1059)

While Patricia's classmates indicate that they view her and others from her community as potentially dangerous and definitely different, her Northside peers work to push her back to her place even as she works to challenge such negative stereotypes.

Maple's Differentiating Curriculum

The differentiating curriculum Patricia has encountered during her first two years of high school most differentiates her experience from Marbella's and Carla's. First, while European American youth are, as at Huntington and Explorer, disproportionately represented in Maple's advanced classrooms, the PEP program has succeeded in empowering many traditionally under-represented youth of color to attend advanced classes.[10] Of six noticeably Latino youth in Patricia's advanced English classroom, I recognized four (including Patricia) from Maple's PEP program. Moreover, Patricia's PEP teacher consistently voices confidence in Patricia's ability to succeed academically,

[10] For example, at Maple, Latino youth were 72.3 percent as likely to take advanced English courses as one would expect given their enrollment. This compares to 36.2 percent at Explorer and 55 percent at Huntington. Statistics for African Americans are similar. In fall 1990, Latino students made up 33.2 percent of Maple's fluent English proficient (FEP) population and comprised 24 percent of its advanced English classes, African Americans 8.5 percent of Maple's FEP population and 6.5 percent of its advanced English classes, European Americans 49 percent of Maple's FEP population and 57 percent of its advanced English courses, Asian Americans 9.3 percent of Maple's FEP population and 12.5 percent of its advanced English enrollment.

and thereby challenge social borders which separate youth from her home and local school community:

> WHAT ABOUT PEP, WHAT DO THEY EXPECT OF YOU?
>
> They expect you to go to college! Definitely! They expect you to get good grades cause they're there. You know, if there's something, an assignment you don't understand, they're there to help you, so they expect you to get good grades....(VA17STB:1517-1526)

Besides articulating a belief that his 88 students of color can and will achieve academically, Patricia's PEP teacher takes advantage of his writing curriculum to demonstrate how people of color have used finally honed writing to mount effective arguments for their communities. To demonstrate the use of cause and effect, for example, he held up a passage by Martin Luther King Jr. on the damaging effects of segregation.

Second, unlike Marbella and Carla, Patricia has constant and assured access to several sources of "cultural capital." All Maple students benefit from an academic counselor and an active career center technician. Moreover, Patricia has received information from college preparation programs, some of which are directed specifically at low-income youth of color. Moreover, 20 percent of PEP class time is devoted to college counseling and motivational speakers. Patricia describes some of the assistance she has received at Maple below:

> ...there's college counselors that sort of come every once in awhile, and they plan out this thing. And, I see what classes they planned out for me in order to get to college and that's what I'm going for, you know, college entrance. To get all my credits for college entrance. And, I try to take classes that I know that I might use with my future career, like science and math. Cause I want to be a doctor.

DID YOU GET MUCH INFORMATION FROM MR. BERGER ABOUT COLLEGE OR HAS PEP BEEN HELPFUL WITH THAT?

> Yes, they help you a lot with that because they have these college videos, videos about different colleges, and you get to see the campuses, instead of going all the way out in la-la land. It's right there on tape. So you get to see the campuses and you get to hear about the programs and stuff, and Mr. Berger discusses colleges also with us. He always pushes everybody to go to Berkeley, I don't know for what reason. But he always does. And he just - he wants everybody in PEP to go to college, that we study real hard for college. (VA17STD:1417-1435)

Patricia's knowledge of the system has increased since she entered high school. In the middle of her freshman year, Patricia planned to go to a trade school and learn a skill that would enable her to pay her way through a four-year college. By the end of her sophomore year, she saw scholarships as a possibility and had set her sights on applying directly to a four-year state university.

* * *

For Patricia, lessons relevant to her Northside, Latina identity are found not only in Spanish class, but also in Maple's relational and differentiating curricula. While Patricia's PEP and Spanish teachers teach that social borders can be blurred, her peers challenge these meanings in various ways. At the same time, an empowering differentiating curriculum teaches Patricia that information she needs to navigate social borders is available in her environment. But how has Patricia responded to these messages?

First and foremost, Patricia's access to cultural capital gives her a freedom not enjoyed by students like Carla Chavez, who must rely on her European and Asian American peers for assistance. Rather than conforming wholly to the demands of varied

social environments, Patricia can afford to evaluate and select aspects from each to create a "transcultural" (Rosaldo 1989) ethnic identity. In both her self-presentation and voice, Patricia resists hiding either the "schoolgirl" high-achieving aspects of her character from her working-class peers, or the working-class, Latina aspects of her heritage from her European American middle-class peers. On her bright yellow notebook, Patricia plays with words from two cultures to proclaim her romantic attachment: Patricia con Roberto, Patricia and Robert, Patrice y Roberto. In her advanced English classroom, dominated by European American peers, she moves without inhibition between English and Spanish while speaking with her Latino friends. In Spanish, she talks and jokes with friends from her neighborhood yet also returns to her seat, despite their protests, to continue her seatwork. In her active fund-raising efforts for the school (she was the top fund raiser during her freshman year) and her participation on the school's swim team, Patricia also makes her allegiance to Maple High School and upward norms of mobility public. Patricia is aware of and proud of her defiance of "typical" standards of behavior:

> DO YOU EVER FEEL LIKE YOU KIND OF HAVE TO CHANGE THE WAY YOU ACT AROUND CERTAIN FRIENDS...DO YOU HAVE TO PUT ON ONE FACE FOR SOME PEOPLE...
>
> No, I really don't think I have more than one face. I, you know, they're all - I really think of it as if they don't like me for who I am, I ain't gonna' change for 'em. It's just me. And maybe in time I might evolve in to something else, but, until that time I ain't just gonna' snap my fingers and say 'Hey, starting acting like this cause that's how, the way they want to see you.' That's just what I plan to do; what I want to do. (VA17STEN:763-784)

Patricia's strong will and independence are highly visible aspects of her public persona, so visible, in fact, that they have earned her a nickname: "The rebel. (laughs) They call me the rebel because I'm always alone." (VA17STEN:895-899)

At the same time, Patricia has paid a price for her efforts to challenge Maple's relational curriculum. While Patricia chats and jokes with peers from her neighborhood, she does not "fit in" with a group or identify any youth at school as a close friend:

> I don't really have that many friends. Oh I got friends that like hi, bye, like that, but not so many that I really could get close to. I don't trust people. (VA17STC:1320-1324)

As Patricia speaks of her efforts to practice a transcultural identity, she illustrates Foucault's argument vividly. In working to blur the lines between social groups, she faces criticism from some of her Northside peers and lack of understanding from her middle-class peers, who struggle to make sense of this young woman who fails to fit into the dominant categories at Maple High School.

A Summing Up

What implications do these youths' voices have for the way in which scholars envision a multicultural curriculum? Most basically, Marbella, Carla and Patricia agree with those who argue that a school setting which fosters the political conditions necessary for varied voices to participate in the educational process is basic to a multicultural curriculum. (O'Connor 1989) All of them emphasize that the hidden curricula they encounter teaches lessons with ethnic and social relevance. Interactions with teachers and peers, the manner in which adults handle social differences, institutional differentiation and informational resources available in the environment are among the

sources of ethnically-relevant meanings for these youth. Moreover, these youth indicate that fostering an appreciation of cultural diversity and an understanding of the causes and consequences of racism and classism among European American youth is crucial, for all agree that the prejudices and misconceptions they encounter when interacting with European American peers are disempowering. These aspects of the multicultural curriculum, while seldom mentioned in policy debates, are clearly important to consider.

The differentiating and relational curricula helped shape the choices that each of these youth was able to consider with regard to the practice of her ethnic identity. Whether one believes that a multicultural curriculum should foster an appreciation of diversity, or help youth understand and take action against social inequality, this has serious implications. If high-achieving youth of color in the school find it difficult to reveal aspects of their ethnicity because of their isolation in advanced classrooms and/or their need to foster good relationships with European American peers, than one might question whether a school's curriculum is really multicultural. Only in environments where youth can openly display their ethnicity or create blended identities can we say that the curriculum fosters an appreciation of diversity or an understanding of social borders. Only in environments where disenfranchised youth are provided with conditions in which they can empower themselves are youth being given the opportunity to acquire the skills necessary to take long-term, effective action against oppression and inequality.

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